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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how the relationship between "individual" and "institution" is constructed in people's perceptions about other cultures, and manifested in conversation. The potential for inappropriate generalization and misunderstanding of situations and cultures was examined. A videotape recording of a Japanese family and two guests, one American and one Japanese, was analyzed, focusing on one awkward conversational exchange involving racially discriminatory remarks. Analysis included review of the videotape with the American guest, mother, daughter, four Japanese graduate students, and four American graduate students. Subsequently, interviews were conducted with the American guest and an American college student with experience in Japanese culture. Interview emphasis was on how experiences in Japan affected perceptions of Japan, with particular attention paid during analysis to use of personal pronouns as a measure of the speaker's identification with the world. Analysis identified some cultural differences in behavior that could lead to misunderstanding and some commonalities (e.g., in gestures) that led to common interpretation. Dynamics of co-membership or identification with the culture during the conversation were also examined. It is concluded that generalizations in speech can create misunderstanding, and that "hedges" such as "I think," "it seems," "it might," etc., although considered sociolinguistically powerless in the United States, may help prevent conflict. (MSE)

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The trap of generalization: A case of encountering a new culture

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The relationship between *individual* and *institution* is constructed in people's perceptions about other cultures and it is manifested in conversation. In this study, interactions between Americans and Japanese (using video footage and narratives) are investigated as examples of possible problems with generalizations and cultural misunderstanding across situations and cultures. The danger of generalizations about cultures is critically discussed. This leads to questioning about conventional sociolinguistic concepts such as *speech community*, *rules of speaking*, and *appropriateness*.

Introduction

Intercultural communication between Americans and Japanese has not necessarily been smooth in the past. Recent Japan bashing from the American side and a mood of *Kenbei* (American-hating) from the Japanese side represent this deep-rooted issue which has been propagated by various economic problems and critical remarks from the media and politicians. The danger of misunderstanding seems to me to come from ignorance and misleading generalizations.

In this paper, I will examine how the relationship between *individual* and *institution* is constructed in people's perceptions about other cultures and how it is manifested in conversation. Cases will be investigated as examples of possible problems with generalizations and misunderstandings of situations and other cultures. The danger of generalizing about a culture will be critically discussed. This leads to questioning what a "speech community" (e.g., Gumperz, 1972) is,

who sets "rules of speaking" (Hymes, 1972b), and who defines "appropriateness" in a given situation.

International/cultural issues are unavoidable in our daily lives; they affect each of us, often in very direct ways. The expansion of international trade, the interdependency of the global community, and the rapid communication between peoples of different nations force more individuals to interact with unfamiliar cultures in a way that generations a few decade ago could never have foreseen.

Despite the fact that Japan has become one of the most important economic forces in the world today, there are still, surprisingly, few opportunities in the United States to learn in depth about Japan and the Japanese people. In the past, only scholars of Japanology undertook this study. Today, not only Japanologists but also business executives, engineers, trade representatives, athletes, and artists are participating in this intermingling of cultures. While these cultural exchanges have increased in number, the question of how the communication is being realized still remains. Although "research in many disciplines has emerged which aims at facilitating and improving communication and understanding" (Miller, 1991:111), virtually no micro empirical study has been conducted to investigate what is happening in actual situations.

As a researcher who is a native speaker of Japanese and has been exposed to both American and Japanese cultures, I hope to shed new light on this kind of cross-linguistical/cultural analysis. This study hopes to help both Americans and Japanese who find themselves participating in cross-cultural encounters, especially those who feel frustrated by traditional stereotypes imposed by past Japanologists.

Procedure

Analysis in this paper is based on videotaped and audiotaped data collected in Philadelphia in 1992. A dinner table scene of a Japanese family and two guests was videotaped. The family is composed of the daughter, who has been studying at an American university for almost two years, and her mother, who had come to the U.S. two months before to visit her daughter. The two guests were myself, a Japanese male who has been living and studying in the U.S. for almost three years (referred as "Japanese Guest," or JG, in this paper), and an American student of Japanese ("American Guest," or AG) who went to Japan for

one year as an exchange student and is fluent in Japanese.[1] The entire dinner table conversation took place in Japanese.

A microanalysis of the videotape was done for a 5 minute and 30 second segment, which was chosen out of the 1 hour and 40 minute dinner table conversation (Appendix). During the entire dinner table conversation, I noticed three uncomfortable moments based on my own judgment: (1) when there were racially discriminatory remarks; (2) during a Nagasaki bomb story; and, (3) during a story of American air-raid, all of which were invoked by the mother's narratives. For the microanalysis, I chose the first topic, which occurred 20 minutes into the conversation, because it is a serious issue that people are facing in contemporary societies. The transcript I will use in this paper is rewritten for the convenience of the readers. The analysis is based on the original microtranscript which includes verbal and non-verbal actions on a scroll with four partitions per second (cf., Erickson, 1982).[2]

Follow-up review sessions of the video tape were conducted with AG, the mother, the daughter, four Japanese graduate students, and four American graduate students (two of whom understood Japanese). The 20 to 30 minute footage which contained the part for microanalysis was shown to each reviewer separately; reviewers' responses to the conversation were collected.

Subsequently, two interviews were conducted by me in my office: one with the American Guest, the other with another college student (referred as "the College Student," or CS) who spent six weeks in Japan in the summer of 1992. The only explanation I gave before the interviews was that I was interested in hearing about the interviewees' experiences in Japan for my intercultural communication research. The major question I asked them was about how their experiences in Japan affected their perceptions of Japan. Since they had been students of mine for more than a year, it seemed to me that the conversation took place in an informal and relaxing atmosphere despite the presence of the tape recorder. Transcribed narratives from the interviews were analyzed with particular attention to the personal pronouns used in the conversation. Investigating these pronouns seemed to be a way to articulate the speaker's identification with the world.

Microethnography as a Method

The fundamental strength of a picture, especially a video-recorded motion picture, lies in the iconicity of an event from which people can reconstruct their

own reality employing information which mere words tend to leave out. Microethnographic analysis' use of video recordings has a potential to influence the discovery and display what is otherwise concealed in the unconscious—"to make the familiar strange" (Erickson, 1986:83). On the other hand, the information that is available on the screen can not portray the larger social context in which the event takes place. In this regard, microethnography is "not an alternative to more general ethnography but a complement to it" (Erickson, 1992:1). Disciplined subjectivity is called upon because the entire process of analysis, including the initial decisions of what to record and how to record and later transcription decisions,[3] can not be entirely neutral in that they depend on the researcher's knowledge (inventory of lenses) and perception (choice of particular lens). In other words, the linguistic and sociocultural knowledge/assumptions that an analyst can bring into the context delimit the possible meanings of the scene.

Research at the Dinner Table

Research at the dinner table has been conducted by Erickson for many years,[4] the focus of which is mainly on "the interactional organization of discourse coherence strategies in a family conversation at the dinner table" (Erickson, 1990:207). The basic research question of this kind of study is "...what is the content of each individual's practical knowledge of how to interact and how does that knowledge get realized in the patterned performance of face-to-face interaction?" (Shultz, Florio & Erickson, 1982:89).

Through my analyses of the dinner table conversation, many issues came to my attention such as contextualization[5] and communicative competence. Among them, I would like to focus on face-to-face communication and its dynamics.

Criticizing Saussurian linguistics as scientific fiction (abstract objectivism[6]), Bakhtin explained actual speech communication in the following way:

> The fact is that when the listener perceives and understands the meaning (the language meaning) of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it. He either agrees or disagrees with it (completely or partially), augments it, applies it, prepares for its execution, and so on" (1976:68).

He was quite correct in mentioning the interactive aspect of speech communication rather than the unilaterally conveyed process (cf., Gumperz, 1982:160). Throughout the conversation taking place at the dinner table, speakers and listeners negotiate each other's intention and imagined "what the speaker wishes to say" (Bakhtin, 1976:77). In this sense, the dinner table became a negotiation table. Rosaldo's critique of Searle's categories was useful in analyzing the interaction:

> Searle's categories are versatile enough to be applied to other people's acts of speech. But at the same time, they can be criticized for undue emphasis upon the speaker's psychological state, and corresponding inattention to the social sphere....[C]ertain of our culturally shaped ideas about how human beings act have limited our grasp of speech behavior (1982:227-228).

Instead of considering Austin or Searle's speech act theories as universal law,[7] it seems necessary to view them as "culturally particular modes of speaking"[8] (Rosaldo, 1982:228) to explain effectively what caused the uncomfortable moment (Erickson, 1982) in the data.

Analysis

The five minutes and thirty seconds which contained the first topic was analyzed in detail (Appendix). It consists of four principle parts: the leading part (about the host's apartment); the main story part (the mother's impression of Americans); the repairing part (shift of topic to Tokyo); and the ending part (return to earlier topic). The major shifts of footing occurred at 2:20 (the mother's address to the American Guest), at 3:50 (modification of topic), and at 4:18 (complete ending of the uncomfortable topic and back to the food topic). These shifts were marked not only by verbal information (content, speed, pause, volume, choice of lexicon), but also by non-verbal cues such as change in posture, eye contact, movement of utensils, and so forth. Analysis of the turn-taking frequency of the primary speaker and the primary listener illuminate the participant structure.

Topics of Conversation

Since I had met the family only a few times before that occasion and the American Guest (AG) was new to them, the topic choice of the entire conversation

can be characterized as a process to find comembership cues. Since the family and AG had never met before, their commonly experienced topic tend to be the "here and now"—the activity of consuming food. The topic seems to go back and forth around food (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Frequency of Topic Change During 1 hr. 40 minute recording

food
residence
cat
greeting
food
language (Japanese)
food
language (Nagasaki dialect)
food
residence of guests
experience in the U.S. of the mother
food
Nagasaki (festival)
leg
cat
Nagasaki (home-stay experience)
Nagasaki war story
food
leg
food
Nagasaki (history
Kyuushuu (war story)
food
residence (furniture)
food
parking meter
weather
residence
food
hobby
personal history of the guests
food
leg
food

Food seems to be a safe and neutral topic for dinner table conversation because: 1) eating constitutes an immediate shared comembership as a participant in the eating activity; 2) eating itself is a universal human behavior (i.e., biological consumption of food, culturally different aspects of food and manner are not meant here); and, 3) the participants' evaluation of taste do not have to be expressed honestly in this situation. People rarely step on each other's toes and risk losing face in talking about food, unless the occasion is a cooking contest. Another immediate topic was the house and the neighborhood in which they were spatially located at that moment.

They did, however, find a common "then and there" (e.g., a space that they had shared before at a different time)—Nagasaki. AG had lived in Nagasaki for a year and the family had come from that island. In this regard, Nagasaki was one of the constituents of their comembership, although "Nagasaki" had a different context for each of them, i.e. the memory of war for the mother and the memory of an exchange student for AG.

A commonly shared experience in terms of space and time outside the dinner table was that they both had lived in each others' countries. Therefore, the U.S. and Japan—those institutions and people—became a subject of the

conversation. This led to a noticeably uncomfortable moment. In order to build more comembership, the mother sent cues which extended outside the immediate (here and now) comembership. This probing often contains the risk of violating a standard of appropriateness if the addressee does not have that comembership (e.g., has a different perspective).

Details of the two minutes and 20 seconds of this uncomfortable moment were examined focusing on the shift of footing, and the coordination of verbal and non-verbal information.

Transcript 1: Conversation at the Dinner Table

D: *xxx san shitteirudesho*
(you know Mr. xxx)

JG: *a a italia kei no namae desu yo ne*
(ah, ah...that name sounds Italian)

D: *sousu philadelphia shusshin nanndesutte*
(he came from South Philadelphia)

M: *hitoniyottewane koekakeruhitowa koekakerunn desukedo nannteiunokashira watashitachi yappari gaikoku jin nanndana tte kanjirutokiga arunone nanntonaku sogaikann wo kanjitene*
(yeah, some people said hello to me, but...what should I say...we are foreigners after all, I feel that way sometimes...I felt isolated)

M: *nihonni irashi te doudeshitaka nihonno hitowa gaikokunohitoni yasashiidesho*
(how did you feel when you were in Japan? Japanese people are kind to foreign people, aren't they?)

AG.: *soudesune*
(they are kind)

M: *desho watashimo souomounone...watashitachiga americani kite tsuraikotoga takusan attanone...tokidoki nihonno hitoga gaikokujinni taishite motsu kimochiwo kanngaeruto kanngaerarenai kotonanonesee*
(I think so...since we came to the U.S., well, I have experienced many difficulties, sometimes...when I think of the feelings Japanese people have toward foreign people, I just cannot believe (what's happening here))

AG.: (nodding)

M: *dakara watashitachiwo oriental to shite asian to shite nihonjin to shitejanakute miteirunone...kekkyoku watashitachi...america no hitowa kannyoude sugoku shinnsetsunishitekureta koto wa kannsha shiteirukedo...saikin japan basshing nante kotogaaruto sonokotodakega omoteno kaoni natte shimmate*
(so, they look at us as Orientals and Asians, not as Japanese, I suppose...but, after all, we feel we are obliged to Americans because Americans have been generous, and have treated us so well...so, when people hear "Japan bashing", only that phenomenon becomes the superficial image)

JG: *toukyou demo asia karano gaikokujinnga no hitoga fuetemasuyone tokuni arabukei no hitoga fuete*
(even in Tokyo, the number of foreign people such as Asians and Arabs is becoming larger recently)

D: *itsuka toukyou niwa nihonjinga inakunacchaunja naikashira*
(someday there will end up being no more Japanese in Tokyo)

M: *sone*
(yeah)

D: *souiu hitotachi nohouga yoku hatarakudesho*
(those people work harder (than Japanese))

JG: *chikatetsuno koujinannkamo kareraga inaito dekinairashiidesune*
(I heard that no subway construction can be done without help of those (foreign) people)

D: *okaasan karaage totte kudasaranai*
(Mom, can you get some fried chicken for me?)

Major Shift

A major shift of footing (Goffman, 1979) was marked by the mother's focusing her address on AG and, in doing so, putting him in the spotlight. Since the subject of a sentence is usually omitted in Japanese, the listener has to judge from the context whom the speaker is addressing. In this sense, Japanese can be said to be a highly context bound language. In this data, several contextualization cues such as the mother's direct gaze to AG, a postural shift forward to AG, a louder voice, and a slower pace were observed. Notably, the last two cues, which are often found in native/non-native interactions, indicated the mother's assumption that she should speak Japanese that a non-native speaker (AG) would understand. In this way, verbal and non-verbal cues cooperate. From this moment (lines 14-16), the mother, as the primary speaker, dominated the floor without major turn-taking until another shift.

The second major shift was marked by JG's repairing comment (lines 39-42) which broke the domination of the mother's narrative and which invited the daughter's speech as a result (lines 44-45). The daughter's low tone of voice seemed to indicate the uneasiness of the situation.

The third shift was initiated by a complete topic shift when the daughter asked the mother to get some fried chicken, accompanied by the cross-table activity of dish movement (lines 57-58).

Cooperative Management of Conversation

Saving face is said to be a highly valued interactional rule in Japanese culture (cf., Christopher, 1982 cited in Wolfson, 1989:24). It may be possible to say that the major activity at the dinner table where guests are present is to maintain and improve a peaceful, "feeling good" environment, avoiding any direct conflicts and loss of face. This is more important than the act of consuming the food itself. In this data, each listener cooperated to accomplish this goal. For example, AG raised his head and looked at the mother when she began to address him (lines 14-16). He sent several back-channeling utterances and nodded to confirm that he was listening and agreeing with what she was saying (line 28). I found JG exhibiting almost the same listening behavior in order to avoid direct confrontation in that situation, even though he did not agree with what the speaker was saying.[9] When we think of this kind of conversational strategy, the meaning of maxim of quality (Grice, 1975) can be seen to depend highly on the culturally bound situation. Sensing that the mother was addressing AG, the daughter and JG refrained from intervening in the speech until the mother sent cues that she was ending her speech, i.e., less confident speech marked by nervous hand movements, shifting eye contact to JG, and pausing (lines 36-37). Eating activities were interestingly coordinated with speech activities.[10] For example, the listeners waited for the beginning or end of a sentence or syllable to move chopsticks or dishes.

Participant Structure

In the data, the mother took the floor most of the time as the primary speaker. The mother was the oldest in the group and the host of the dinner. JG had met the host only a few times before the scene and therefore the social distance was relatively large. In this case, the difference in age between the mother and the rest of the members might have been the key factor in determining her social role in this micro organization. Also, as a native speaker of the language used in the speech event, the mother might have assumed that her position would not be challenged by the other participants. Therefore, it may be that she had power, especially in relation to AG who was the youngest and a non-native speaker of the language. In addition, because AG was a student of JG, AG was framed in a lower power relationship in this organization. These factors might explain his strategy of silence.

Cultural Aspects of Conversation at the Dinner Table

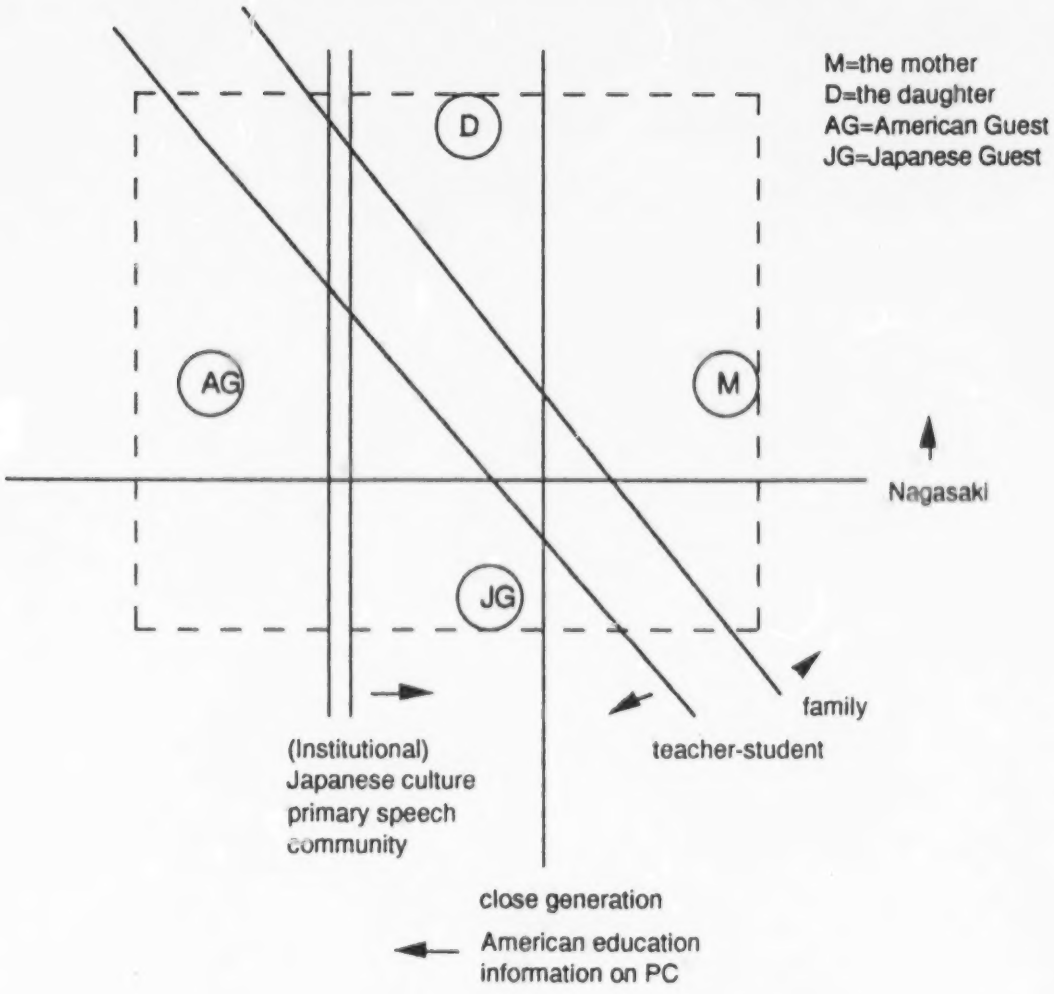
After showing the video to four American graduate students, a certain behavior which they claimed as a distinctive feature of two cultures, the act of lifting bowls when eating, was identified. Interviews with those Americans revealed that in American culture this act is considered inappropriate. On the other hand, in Japanese culture this act is not seen as a violation of rules, but as proper etiquette. I and four Japanese graduate students had not realized this behavioral difference until it was pointed out by the Americans. In other words, this performance cue was not emically salient and meaningful to me as a native Japanese, but was very meaningful to non-Japanese people.

On the other hand, the four Americans found many features of behaviors which led to a common interpretation of the scene despite the fact that two of them did not understand the language. For example, the mother's hand movements in the air and to her glasses were indexed as nervous and unsure of her opinion, shifting eye contact was seen as seeking support from the listener, a smile as showing understanding, keeping silent as an indication of not understanding or disagreeing with the speaker. In this regard, language is playing only a partial role in transmitting the information available in face-to-face interaction. It is necessary to look into the simultaneous organization of behavior as well as the surrounding larger context in order to understand more about the deep structure of this small "table society."

Comembership Dynamics

Lastly, I would like to discuss the perceptional dynamics of comembership during the conversation. Even this small social organization consists of many semantic categories of comembership or culture (Figure 2). These are by no means static. They changed from moment to moment according to each person's perceptions as a result of information gathered through all his/her sensory systems. For example, when the mother started the topic with which I felt uncomfortable, I more strongly identified myself as a member of the group who believes that such a topic is inappropriate, rather than comembership with the mother as a member of the Japanese culture. Linguistically speaking, this uncomfortableness comes from her use of the first person plural "we" and "us" (lines 22, 31, and 32) in her narrative. I was not comfortable with being included in her "we."

Figure 2: Major Categories of Comembership



Interview 1

An interview was held with the American student (AG in the transcript) who appeared in the video scene. The following is an excerpt of the transcript from a 1 hour interview (AG = American Guest, I = interviewer). AG's generalized cultural views were underlined and the pronouns in these sentences were marked in bold.[11]

Transcript 2: Interview with AG

AG: like after six months, my Japanese got ok, I could speak pretty well, and if you could speak Japanese, Japanese people love you, you know, and they are ten times as nice to you, I mean, they were nice from the beginning, but they were like really impressed, and they are like they really help you if you try to speak Japanese, that helps, and it became natural, I didn't feel so special any more

I: you are a Caucasian and obviously look different from Japanese people...did that make you feel isolated? or you were stared at?

AG: oh, yes, people always stared at me, Nagasaki is kind of in the country, there aren't too many *gaijin* but I mean...little kids, old people always stared at you, especially if I walk around in school uniform, yeah black uniform and a bag, you know, (laugh) they always stared and wondered, I don't know what they were thinking, but like in the bus people didn't sit by me, you know, that stuff

I: hu ha, I know many American students who experienced that kind of thing, and some of them were very frustrated being treated like that...what did you think?

AG: it was annoying, I mean, I think too visible, I mean, I wondered why they couldn't get used to me, because I got used to them, I mean, I was totally used to them in their country and still after six months they didn't get used to me, they are never going to get used to me, you know, just like, even after a year, I was stared at on the street, they never changed, they are not used to

I: you changed your view toward yourself?

AG: I don't know...maybe I realized my inabilities, like, what I couldn't do....I don't know...tough to say...I didn't change too much...not much at all...ah...I have to think about it...I don't know...I've never thought about it

I: your experience changed your view towards Japan?

AG: yeah, before I went to Japan, I didn't know anything about Japan, I mean everything was new, and...and overall my opinion about Japan was very positive

I: became more positive?

AG: yeah, more positive

I: from a neutral point?

AG: yes, yes, definitely to the positive side...and now I think there're some turns me off about Japan

I: what kind of thing is that, for example?

AG: just over-working, over-studying, uh, no women's liberation

AG: what was your question?

I: change your view?

AG: oh, yeah...yes, they just became positive, Japan became a real place in the while, not...not a little tiny dot on map, a bunch of little black haired people walking around, working like crazy, because there were some people who did not work very hard, there were some people who didn't studied really hard, some people who weren't very smart, and they don't conform to the stereotypes, and you need to get to see those people, because there are lot of people like me there too, it's not quite as many

I: how about your view toward the United States?

AG: I wasn't really proud of America, in America too many people think it's the best, and they don't bother learning anything but their country, they don't know others, and that's really embarrassing to have that many people in your country who don't know anything about any other country, so I mean I wasn't that much of patriot before I went to Japan, so I didn't really...I didn't think about it...I was in Japan...and always liked to learn about Japan, much more about Japan

I: how does your experience affect your life in the U.S.?

AG: well, it always keeps me think how everything is relative, people say things are so bad here and I would say look at how bad in Japan, and people say look how good this is here and I can say look how good it is in Japan, you know

I: in a sense, you are not completely American any more

AG: yeah, right, I think so, somewhere between American, German, and Japanese (laugh)

I: I think you identify yourself as American...as a citizen, but how do you feel about your identity?

AG: I feel like a global citizen, but more into America, that's where my family are, all my friends live here, and my mother language, and...I feel most comfortable...definitely, I don't know if I stay here though, it's home

I: what was the most uncomfortable moment while you were in Japan?

AG: one of the most uncomfortable thing was...
ummm... not too bad
not really ..... well I felt a little uncomfortable since I lived in Nagasaki...I was going into *Genbaku Shiryoukan* (Atomic bomb museum)...with a little bit touchy, you know, I mean, just like walking around and looking at everything, you know...I mean, who I am and knowing who these people are, I mean nothing I could do about it personally but I didn't really feel like guilt or anything...but still felt something...I felt a little uncomfortable there...because you just wonder what the Japanese people around...if they were thinking like me and angry thought, something like that, you know...my country killed their parents and you know, but yeah...my host parents...two of my host parents...their parents were killed by the atomic bomb, I mean...and it didn't hurt our relationship really...at first they talked about it, you know, and I was a little bit tense to talk about it, and they didn't talk about it in depth..I mean they mentioned it...and I said it was *taihen* (sorry to hear that) that's about it...and they didn't hold against me while I was there...that's probably one thing I was like a little bit shaky about

I: so in that situation you felt you were an American?

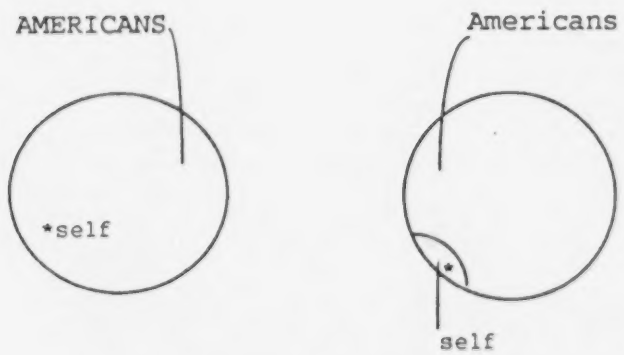
AG: yeah...definitely

The next segment is the transcript made after I showed the video scene to AG.

117	I:	how did you feel at that moment?
118 119	AG:	I don't know...well I wondered why she brought up that topic...but I wanted to say something but I didn't want to say it in Japanese...you know...so I didn't say anything
120	I:	what did you want to say?
121 122	AG:	well...maybe it doesn't happen only to Japanese...everyone feels similar things...it's not because Japanese or America
123	I:	I see

AG used third-person plural pronouns "they," "their," or "them" to refer to Japanese people in most cases (e.g., lines 2-4, 15-19, and lines 69-70). However, in line 44, he uses "they" and "their" to refer to American people. It seems that in the former case he identified himself as American as contrasted with Japanese. In the latter case he avoided identifying himself as American although still not identifying himself as Japanese. That is, in the former case AG positioned himself as AMERICAN (Figure 3). In the latter case he positioned himself as American.

Figure 3:
AMERICANS minus (myself & few exceptional people like myself) = Americans



Later, in line 69, he used "my" to refer to AMERICA—resuming his identifying as American as opposed to Japanese. As we can see from this data, a person's identity to an institution is surprisingly dynamic in nature. Identity can never be static because a person tends to save ego by changing identity when that identity has a conflict of values with the ego.

He used "they" to exclude himself from other Americans because those behaviors of "not learning about other country" are the *achieved* attributes of individuals. In other words, learning about other countries depends on an individual's career choice and an individual's efforts.

On the other hand, the reason he *had to* use "my" in line 69 ("my country killed their parents") was that he did not choose to be an American. This can be called "Ascribed Indexicalization" which includes factors such as gender, race, and nationality. He could not alienate himself from being American and he could not save his ego. This inevitable indexicalization caused his "tenseness" (line 72) or uncomfortableness during that topic period. This student also mentioned the universalistic aspect of the human mind in lines 121-122 ("it's not because Japanese or American").

Another point in his narrative shows that stereotypes of others are also dynamic. In lines 36-41, "Japan became a real place in the world, not a little tiny dot on map" and "they don't conform to the stereotypes," his realization of the plurality within a culture transformed his old generalization. He came to see the Japanese people at a more individual level rather than as a monolithic institution.

I would like to call the generalization based on lack of knowledge (the lack of contact) "The Milky Way Phenomenon." The Milky Way can be seen as one cohesive entity if looked at from the earth. If you could go there, you would find that the stars are millions of light-years apart. Each individual is by no means identical even within a "culture" or a "speech community"; individuals, therefore, are multicultural in this regard.

Interview 2

The following narrative comes from the interview with another American college student (CS in the transcript). He talked about the experience he had in Japan.

Transcript 3: Interview with CS

I: did you feel any culture shock in Japan?

CS: I was shocked when I came into Narita (Tokyo's airport), and first I noticed blacks over there...they were seven...there were four girls...I think they might have been volleyball players...and that surprised me because I didn't think to see anyone...because in that sense I'm very very prejudiced about blacks for the most part,...but there were so many foreigners... just felt uuh...just like...I can't explain it...I guess I was disappointed to leave because I liked it so much...and it ties in basically with how I feel I changed...if I was an American Asian, American black maybe not so much if I was an American Hispanic, but I'm an American white...and I go to Japan and I'm just a white...and that' it...it doesn't...I don't know...I speak English...that puts me up here (hand above his head) compared to anyone else in the entire world...other Japanese...I'm American and I'm white...up here...if I was blond, way up here (stretching his hand)...so I was up there...and then also in fact in America how you look really really matters...it's the way how you look...for a long time...you know...I felt like I was nothing in this country you know... I'm a little overweight...and I'm not very handsome...I'm just a nice guy...I don't do sports...I don't stand out as it is...so...in Japan people come up to you...and people talk to you...it's easier to meet girls there...that was a very big bonus...uh...they like you...I mean first 'cause you can meet them because they want to meet you 'cause you are an American and it's easier because they don't look more inside than outside...I was more confident than Japanese guys...so when I came back I was much more confident...things don't bother me much...much more relaxed...I felt better about myself...I was back to the same people...and at first it was disappointing...I hated not being around Japanese people...I was so used to it. It was comfortable. I never got culture shock in either way

I: you didn't mind being looked at?

CS: it was really funny...lots of my friends hate it...but I like attention...when I walk down here, girls look through me...they just don't see me...but when I was there...well, it was good to know at least I could get attention...so it was an amusement

I: what do you think of the stereotypes about Japan?

CS: a lot of them are true in a sense...uh...when you make a stereotype about someone in America, you can't use it...because everyone in America is different...but in Japan most people are similar because you have to be...that's the way of the culture's stuff

The continuous use of "I" in his narrative suggests his strong identity as "I'm American and I'm white" in contrast to Japanese people and at the same time in contrast to other Americans who are not white. His explicit racial remark in line 5 ("I'm very prejudiced about blacks") and his strong denial of generalization toward "the" American culture in lines 29-31 ("everyone in America is different," using present tense without hedging) indicates his alienating attitude toward other races in the U.S. In this way, "prejudice" (in line 5), a product of generalization, can be detected from the surface structure of his speech.

His ignorance of pluralistic aspects of Japanese people (lines 30-31, "but in Japan, most people are similar") can be explained by his relatively low

exposure to Japanese people. At this stage, he relied on generalizations about institutions and culture rather than on individual attributes. In this sense, he used the term "culture" (in line 31) with different and multiple implications as he talked about Japan and the United States.

Generalization is a process of constructing reality. This narrative shows the dangerous nature of generalization which often comes from the ego saving[12] (e.g., "attention" from others, line 27) automatic response, and naive ignorance.

Generalization

In the following section, I analyze the video footage, incorporating what we saw in the interview data and looking more closely at the dynamic nature of culture. Instead of the conventional notion of culture, I will focus on the concept of *comembership*.

Paradoxically, the uncomfortable moment can be detected only in contrast to comfortable moments.[13] The reason that *I felt* uncomfortable in the first videotaped data was that *I thought* the topic choice of the speaker was not appropriate in that situation. This is usually called a violation of sociolinguistic rules. But who sets the rules? The rules are bound by the norm of a "speech community," the members of which share a common knowledge on "what to say and whom to say it to" (Wolfson, 1989:17). Statements such as "that person doesn't know how to speak appropriately, because he/she is from another culture" illustrate that the rules of speaking are a component of culture. What is confusing is the fact that the notion of culture is often associated with nationality, race, gender, age, educational background, socioeconomic status, and so on. According to Goodenough, a culture is "what you have to know in order to operate as a member of the society" (1964:36-37). These classifications seem to be rather institutional and static,[14] because the nature of society is regarded as something that can be grouped for a certain duration. Despite the fact that "'cultural factors' is a vague and fuzzy concept" (Fisher, 1980:7), people use the term "culture" often without questioning what it means. Whenever we can not find a rational answer, we tend to blame "culture."

On the other hand, I found that the sense of comembership,[15] which is perceived by the individual participant, plays an important role in face-to-face interaction. That comembership is highly dynamic during the interaction with the same participants. For example in the data, the mother, the daughter, and JG

shared "Japanese culture" including the language, and the topic of a person whom three of us had known in common as indices of comembership (recall Figure 3). But at another moment, AG, the daughter, and JG shared a certain rule of speaking which was perceived differently by the mother. In the latter speech event, the information on whether or not the racially discriminatory comment is appropriate in the U.S. constitutes the formation of comembership. If my American student (AG) had not been present in the audience, I might not have felt uncomfortable with the mother's topic. I felt uncomfortable because he is an American (in contrast to other participants) and because he is my student. I *thought* he would feel uncomfortable with the mother's topic. I did not want to see this happen to him, because it would damage a relationship which I value. I felt obliged to repair that situation. In this way, the perception of uncomfortableness derives from the relative social relationship and from the value of that relationship. These kinds of "small-scale political relations" (Erickson, 1982:212) tend to be neglected when people talk about culture, especially when the location is geographically and cognitively distant as we see the relationship between the U.S. and Japan. Earlier, I called this the "Milky Way Phenomenon." Each individual is by no means identical even within a culture or a speech community; each individual is multicultural in this regard with an aggregate of multilayered comembership. No two people share the same set of semantic categories of social identity. JG shared comembership with AG as influenced by American higher education on "politically correct" speech, as much as JG did with the mother as a citizen of Japan. In other words, JG wished to identify himself with *that* group on *that* issue at *that* moment. Comembership is not a static object shared among the participants but is interactively negotiated and dynamic throughout the discourse.

Thus, the monolithic generalization of a "culture" is not only misleading but also dangerous in some situations. In the data, the mother's statement on the American and Japanese attitudes toward foreigners is a good example of often-felt temptations for generalization. An individual is seen in the context of the institution to which he/she belongs; individual attributes and institutional attributes are mixed as a consequence. AG may not have an identity associated with the institution which treated the mother badly or dropped a bomb during the War. Yet he was indexed with the institution while the mother talked on those topics simply because of his membership in that institution based on other aspects. This can be called "Ascribed Indexicalization." A person can be accused of/praised for

something that is not his own fault/accomplishment due to the nature of the institution with which he is indexed—even though where he may have no control over the reason of accusation (or praise).

The uncomfortable moment which I felt in the data was derived partially from the mother's strong tendency to generalize her personal opinion into a universal statement, the topic of which was inappropriate in my perception. However, it is also inappropriate for me to make a judgmental comment on the mother's speech[16] because my comment inevitably comes from my generalization of my rules of speaking. That rigid frame is what I criticize in this paper. My judgment comes from my standard. In this way, the most important thing to be considered is that interpretation of even a small-scale social interaction is delimited within each individual's construction of reality.

Implications

The human mind must have "a means of efficiently screening, sorting, coding and storing sensory data" (Fisher, 1988:23) because we have no time and energy to examine each particularistic feature every time.[17] We have to generalize a certain range of the color spectrum to recognize that the color is red in order to hit the brake pedal at a traffic signal. Also, we live within institutions with other people. For members of a group to "cooperate 'simplifies' the environment" (Fisher, 1988:23). Therefore, we have culture. More fundamentally, language (semantics) itself is a product of generalization—we can not argue each time if a red round fruit in a grocery store is really an apple with a shopkeeper. We can not escape from generalization.

The close examination of the differences in generalization depending on the level of speech is still an open question. Also, the relationship between communicative competence and disciplined generalization is yet to be discussed. However, as a tentative conclusion, we may be able to reduce the danger of generalization by conscious effort. Since generalization in a person's mind can be seen in "the surface linguistic form of the sentence of a narrative" (Tannen, 1979:179),[18] we can start by becoming sensitive[19] to our speech. First, we have to be careful about the use of generalized subjects (e.g., "the Japanese" or plural pronouns such as "we" or "they"). Secondly, we can use hedges in our speech (e.g., "I think," "it seems," "might," etc.); unfortunately, these are regarded as sociolinguistically powerless features in the U.S. If people, especially those who

are in power (e.g., politicians, journalists, scholars, etc.) were a little more careful about generalized speech, I THINK that less conflict and fewer uncomfortable moments would occur.

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[1] As part of an assistantship, I teach a Japanese Business course. "American Guest" is one of the students in my class.

[2] The distinction between verbal and non-verbal seems to vary depending on the researcher. In this paper, verbal information means "what you can retrieve with your eyes closed" (or from the audio-tape recording, including silence or pose, excluding possible noises made by body movements or utensils), and non-verbal means "what you see with the volume completely shut off." Still, in this definition of non-verbal information, the direct information of smell, taste, and temperature are left out with today's video-recording technology.

[3] See E. Ochs (1979).

[4] Erickson pointed out six main kinds of local production resources for the local work of talking and eating as follows: (1) general cultural knowledge; (2) knowledge of phonology, lexicon, and grammar; (3) knowledge and skill in using utensils; (4) spatial positioning of participants; (5) patterns of family relationship [e.g., speaker-audience collaboration]; and, (6) temporal organization of speech and body motion in interaction (1991:5).

[5] See Gumperz (1982).

[6] Ethnographic analysis, on the other hand, can be called "concrete subjectivism."

[7] See Fairclough (1989:9).

[8] Keenan also pointed out a major problem of Grice's conversational maxims, saying "the implicature depends on how the utterance is expected to behave with respect to conversational maxims, and these may vary situationally and cross-culturally" (1976:68).

[9] Throughout the analysis I will use "JG" and "he" to refer to the participant in the interaction (myself) and "I" to refer to myself as the researcher.

[10] See Erickson (1991).

[11] See Cialdini for another case of distinguishing "we" and "they" in speech (1984:194-196).

[12] "The role of prejudice in protecting one's self-esteem" (Wurzel, 1988:15)

[13] Regarding this, Wolfson said: "...sociolinguistic researcher... is oblivious to their [rules of speech behavior] existence until they are broken. Thus, we are in the happy position of being able to learn from the mistakes of others" (1989:73).

[14] The notion here includes both universalistic (those which potentially could be achieved by any individual) and particularistic attributes (those which are determined by birth) which were defined by Erickson (1982:15).

[15] Erickson said, "comembership involves attributes of shared status that are particularistic rather than universalistic" (1982:35). However, I do not agree with this argument. Many times comembership derives from universalistic attributes such as alumni associations, especially in Japan. Due to the nature of Japan's homogeneous society, where the range of differences in

particularistic attributes is smaller than that in the U.S., the universalistic attributes (e.g., educational background and occupation) count more for formation of comembership.

[16] I later found out that the mother had trouble with her landlord which led her to make such a critical comment against Americans. With this additional contextual information, my judgment might change.

[17] Tannen put it in the following way: "...in order to function in the world, people cannot treat each new person, object, or event as unique and separate. The only way we can make sense of the world is to see the connection between things, and between present things and things we have experienced before or heard about. These vital connections are learned as we grow up and live in a given culture" (1979:137).

[18] Tannen was discussing structures of expectation in the sentence which is a form of generalization.

[19] In this regard, cultural sensitivity should include sensitivity toward generalization.

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Appendix
The Entire Dinner Table Conversation (duration = 1h 40m)

20 min 25 : 30 min

Principle Parts	Leading: Story about the Host's Apartment		Starting: the mother's story about her impression of America					Repairing: shift of topic to Tokyo			Ending: back to food topic	
Primary Discourse Topics	Ghost Story	Neighborhood of our common friend	M's feeling as foreigner	Japan's case	M's experience	Interpretation as Orientals, Asians	Japan bashing	Tokyo's situation	Future	Hardworking foreigners	Asking for Chicken	Asking if AG liked food
Primary Speaker	M D	M D	M	M	M	M	M	JG	D	D JG	D	M
Primary Listner	JG	JG	JG	AG	AG	AG JG	AG JG	M AG	M AG	M AG	M	AG
Major Shift				↑				↑			↑	
Verbal Activities	laughter frequent turn-taking		no laughter no turn-taking M's dominant floor	raising intonation, volume				lower volume longer pause slower pace			laughter	
Nonverbal Activities	smile frequent movement of chopsticks, body		less frequent movement	change in posture, eye contact address to AG							posture change	JG left the table
	(tension low)		(tension high)								(tension release)	

M=the mother JG=Japanese Guest
D=the daughter AG=American Guest